



## U.S. Department of Justice

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### **FINAL DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY IN BRIBES-FOR-VISAS SCHEME**

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott and United States Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division announced today that a tenth defendant pleaded guilty in a bribery and visa fraud scheme involving the issuance of visas at the United States Embassy in Sri Lanka. A career State Department employee and her husband, a former consular employee at the United States Embassy in Sri Lanka, are among those who have previously pleaded guilty.

United States Attorney Scott said "In this era more than ever, it is vital to ensure integrity in the issuance of United States visas. The actions of those involved in this case, including a high ranking United States embassy official in Sri Lanka, were reprehensible. I am gratified by the successful collaboration of so many agencies in this investigation, including the Diplomatic Secret Service of the United States Department of State, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives."

"The fraud scheme uncovered in this investigation was a direct assault on the integrity of the U.S. visa process," said Assistant Attorney General Wray of the Criminal Division. "The Department of Justice will not hesitate to prosecute cases where government employees and others wrongly enrich themselves at the expense of the public trust."

Kim Chi Lam, 53, of Gardena, California, pleaded guilty in United States District Court in Sacramento to conspiring to defraud the United States, to bribe State Department officials, and to commit visa fraud. With this guilty plea from Lam, who had operated as a "visa broker" in the scheme, all of the charged defendants in the case have pleaded guilty with the exception of one defendant who is a fugitive. Lam faces a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison, a three year term of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. Sentencing is scheduled for October 15, 2004.

Lam's daughter, Phuong Hien Lam Trinh, 35, of Gardena, California, pleaded guilty on July 7, 2004, to a misdemeanor charge of supplementing the salary of a government official for her role in forwarding bribe money to one of the State Department officials.

A total of 11 defendants have been charged in the case. Two former State Department employees – Long N. Lee, 52, a United States State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee, and her husband Acey R. Johnson, 33, who was a Consular Associate employed in the consular section of the United States Embassy in Sri Lanka – entered guilty pleas April 30, 2004. Six visa broker defendants, brothers Vinesh Prasad, 33, and Minesh Prasad, 28, of Sacramento, California, Narinderjit Singh Bhullar, 40, of Sacramento, California, Rajwant S. Virk, 46, of Herndon, Virginia, Rachhpal Singh, 32, of Newark, California, and Ramesh K. Jaisingh, 57, of Fairfax, Virginia, previously entered guilty pleas. An eleventh defendant is a fugitive.

Under federal sentencing guidelines, the defendants are likely to receive sentences ranging up to 70 months in prison, followed by terms of supervised release. Under federal law, they will be required to serve at least 85% of the prison time imposed. Pursuant to their plea agreements, the defendants have also agreed to forfeit to the United States over \$529,000 in seized cash, bank accounts and jewelry, and two properties with equity values estimated at approximately \$200,000.

The defendants have admitted their involvement in a scheme in which Johnson and Lee took hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for the issuance of visas to various foreign nationals, primarily from Vietnam and India. In her plea of guilty, Lam admitted that, between at least 2000 and 2003, she referred foreign nationals to Lee, who at the time was working at the United States Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Lam gave instructions to foreign nationals, their sponsors, or other brokers as to when and where the foreign nationals would need to go in Sri Lanka in order to receive a visa. The foreign nationals subsequently traveled to Sri Lanka. Johnson issued visas to these individuals while they were in Sri Lanka. The foreign nationals, or their sponsors, or other brokers, then paid Lam. Lam and Trinh then passed a portion of the payments to Lee and Johnson.

Lee, who was the Chief Administrative Officer at the United States Embassy in Sri Lanka from 2000 to 2003, had previously served at United States Embassies in Fiji, Vietnam and Cape Verde. Johnson had worked as a Consular Associate in the United States Embassies in Sri Lanka and Fiji. As a Consular Associate, he was responsible for processing visa applications and issuing visas to foreign nationals.

Lee and Johnson admitted in their plea agreements that Lee agreed to arrange for the issuance of United States visas in exchange for bribes as early as 1995. From that period through early 2003, Lee and Johnson accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribe payments from “visa brokers,” and issued visas to scores of foreign nationals, primarily from India and Vietnam. On instructions from Lee and Johnson, the bribe payments were broken into transactions under \$10,000 to avoid scrutiny, and were paid in a variety of methods – deposits into various bank accounts, payments to family members, and deliveries of cash.

The case is being prosecuted in United States District Court in Sacramento by Assistant United States Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner, and S. Robert Tice-Raskin of the United States Attorney's Office, and Trial Attorney Noah D. Bookbinder of the Public Integrity Section, headed by Noel L. Hillman, Chief. It is the product of an extensive investigation conducted by the Diplomatic Security Service of the United States Department of State, and by agents with the FBI and several other state and federal agencies associated with the Joint Terrorism Task Force

for the Eastern District of California, including the California Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Bureau of Immigration Control and Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security. Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities also provided assistance in the investigation.

This press release can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/home/>. After you are in, click on Press Releases.

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